

Mario Buletić. “What Are you Afraid of? Fear in Our Everyday Life”. Pazin, Ethnographic Museum of Istria / Museo etnografico dell’ Istria, 13th December 2019 – 31st August 2020

Exhibition Review

Not even in the bleakest of prophetic scenarios could we have imagined that the exhibition entitled “What Are you Afraid of? Fear in Our Everyday Life” of the Ethnographic Museum of Istria / Museo Etnografico dell’ Istria would be so up-to-date, associative and motivating as it is currently the case against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is the exhibition layout presented on the 13th December 2019 whose author and originator is Mario Buletić, Senior Curator at the Ethnographic Museum in Istria. Moreover, while the museum was closed during lockdown, the author also provided the online version with the homepage that responds to the new times. It is available at: <https://cegasebojis.wordpress.com>. It also provides the opportunity to go through a recently prepared exhibition catalogue. The contents are available in Croatian, English and Italian and it was visited by several thousand users by the first week of May 2020.

The author pointed out the interdisciplinarity as the main feature of the exhibition and it certainly is its indisputable value and a kind of assurance of a higher level of communicative competence with a higher number of different cultural consumers. A large number of associates, internationally reputed individuals whose work is based on artistic creativity, have greatly contributed to such character and approach to conceptualisation of the exhibition layout. Sound installation “Fragment” was provided by the musicians Alen and Nenad Sinkauz, specifically for this exhibition. The original video material “Izvir voda” (2019) was prepared by the multimedia artist Davor Sanvincenti, while the introductory photography installation “Quintità homini” (2019) was provided by Dejan Štifanić. The works of other authors were also used during the exhibition: drawings and paintings by Nadan Rojnić-Biondog, the work by Josip Pino Ivančić “Žilet Hulja HOOP” (2016), the short feature film Nina Violić “Separation” from 2014 and photographs by Romeo Ibrišević. The series of photographs “Reporting Europe’s Refugee Crisis” from 2015 by the Russian photographer Sergey Ponomarev proved to be particularly impressive, for which the author, who has done extensive work for the New York Times, won the Pulitzer prize.

The exhibition has been divided into several sections and topics and behind each of them there are emotions of fear, their causes and consequences, meanings and manifestations. Fear is considered from different scientific stances – biological, psychological, ethnological, cultural-anthropological, as well as historical and sociological. All of them have been observed dexterously and impressively contextualised by objects, words, (non-)motion pictures, photographs and illustrations. The exhibition opens with the question “What is fear?” and the answer is in the portrayal of the scientific definition of fear as a basic human emotion, encouraging scenes from “The Book of

Rituals - Liji” of an unknown author before the 10th century and the “The Wheel of Emotions” by Robert Plutchik from 1980, as well as the etymology of the very notion of fear. This introductory section also includes a photography by Dejan Štifanić. It is followed by “Fear – Different Perspectives/Dimensions”, the topic with an emphasis on biology, neurobiology and psychology of fear. These perspectives open with exhibits of snakes, spiders and scorpions of the Croatian Natural Sciences Museum and displays of two devices for electrical stimulation from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, as well as a series of disturbing photographs “Fear - Experiments in Physiology, Facial Expressions” by G. Duchenne de Boulogne dating back to 1855/1856.

The visitor is gracefully and expectedly led towards “Conditioned learning of fear/ Basic fears”, the topic that faces us with fear of extinction, mutilation, loss of autonomy, separation and ego-death. These synonyms are the backbone of the pyramid “Feararchy model” by dr. Karl Albrecht dating back to 2007, which we can watch in two video works – the one by Nina Violać and “The Little Albert Experiment” by John B. Watson from 1920. In this section it is important to highlight a dental clinic chair dating back to the first part of the 20th century of Nikola Tesla Technical Museum in Zagreb. The author provides interesting information in the section entitled “Culture and the Politics of Fear” and through tables and graphs, like the one in The Global Risks Report from the World Economic Forum in 2018, it provides a more comprehensive explanation of this dimension of fear in risk society. A special emphasis is on manipulation through fear and among the visual materials it is important to highlight “The Ecological Disaster in the Bay of Raša” by R. Ibrišević from 2018. Perhaps the most impressive section of the exhibition has been dedicated to “Globalisation of Fear” and the local public is particularly familiar with it because of the scene of the collapsed Pula shipyard, i.e. the clothes of a worker from Uljanik and the photographs “Workers on Strike - Uljanik TESU” by D. Štifanić. These are the motifs that remind us of fears conditioned by jeopardised livelihood and they are followed by failure and loneliness.

The fear of otherness is focused on migrant crisis and it catches the eye primarily through powerful suggestive and masterful series of photographs by Ponomar. Next to it there is a hula hoop by J. P. Ivančić and also newspaper articles addressing the same problem have been highlighted. Military uniforms, peasant clothing and weapons are the objects belonging to the EMI/MEI, Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria and Pazin Town Museum that the author selected as a subtopic “Banditry in Istria after the First World War”, whose link with the otherness is in the demonisation of the others. The selected portrait was the one by Ivan Kolarić, the most famous Istrian bandit. This topic abounds in newspaper texts from the period that was marked by actions of the bandits, from 1920 to 1924. As the most inspirational, it is important to point out the maps: a Reconstruction of the secret smuggling routes in Istria from 1918 to 1939, the Zone of the most threatened by gang attacks and the Zone of armed robberies, murders and cow thefts.

Fear of death is put into context with the belief and it opens with some of the most impressive frescoes from Istrian churches – The Dance of Death by Master Vincent from Kastav from the church of St. Mary on Škriljinah in Beram from 1474 and the

“Depiction of Hell” from the church of St. Barnabas in Vižinada from the same century. The objects that the visitor gains insight into are, among others breviaries, rosaries and the wooden statue of Jesus Christ dating back to the 18th century, all of them from the collections of the EMI/MEI. Fear of evil is shown through folk beliefs and objects that tell their tales, such as scissors, tiny mirrors and horseshoes. The objects from the EMI/MEI are particularly impressive. Hence, it is important to highlight a set for civil protection with a gas mask used in the Istrian coal mine Tupljak in 1980, as well as *Larfa* of the gypsies, the typical carnival mask of Međimurje of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb. The attractiveness of fear is the topic that has been shown through fire intervention equipment, as well as diving and mountaineering equipment, while two smaller display cases are dedicated to Narrations of Fear and Fear of Oblivion. The last one brings us Barbie and Ken dolls wearing Istrian *folk costume* and a picture postcard “Motifs from Istria” from the collections of the EMI/MEI, while Narrations of Fear present a small library of titles of traditional and pop culture from a private collection, which is the case and works of other objects. Exhibition layout was devised by Emil Jurcan, while graphic design was provided by Tihana Nalić.

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